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Italian Communist Party Draws Further Away From Moscow

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GROUP 1
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ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY DRAWS FURTHER AWAY FROM MOSCOW

By supporting the Prague leadership in defiance of Soviet sensibilities, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) has staked out for itself a new degree of autonomy. Italian Communist theory has been developing in this direction--with some deviations--since 1956, when party leader Togliatti first publicized his belief in "many roads to socialism." In previous crises in the international Communist movement, however--such as when the USSR invaded Hungary in 1956 and supported the Arabs in the Middle East crisis of 1967--the Italian Communists supported the Moscow line. In the present crisis, the Italian party has shown an unwonted degree of unity and has sought to develop a united front of Western European Communist support for the Prague government. Over the long term, Moscow may seek to oust unfriendly Italian Communist leaders or to split the party if it maintains its present position. In the shorter term, continuing tension between the Soviet and Italian parties seems inevitable. In domestic politics, the Italian party may seek to use evidence of Soviet disapproval to improve its image as an independent, democratic political force respectable enough to sit with the democratic parties in an Italian government.

There are many roads to Socialism.

Palmiro Togliatti, June 1956

The Communist parties and governments of the five countries participating in the intervention must accept the demands presented by the Czechoslovak Government and party.

Luigi Longo, 23 August 1968

Background to Divergence

The origins of the Italian-Soviet disagreement, which has now come to an open split over Czechoslovakia, go back more than a decade. The PCI, a principal heir of the resistance movement of World War II, has long been the political party in Italy with the largest number of votes after the Christian Democratic Party, the key member of every coalition government of the past 20 years. Having achieved such success and come so close to victory through the democratic political process, the PCI has been increasingly keen to win a part in national rule.

Particularly in recent years, the PCI has been struggling to escape from the isolation it has experienced since its long-time ally, the Socialist Party, became instead the ally and governmental partner of the Christian Democrats. The PCI has repeatedly sought to show that Italian Communism is compatible with the democratic process either because world-wide Communism is no longer antidemocratic or, if this thesis is not tenable, because Italian Communism is following a sufficiently different path from that of a Communist dictatorship.

Togliatti's Polycentrism

For over a decade, Italian Communist theory has been developing justification for a stance more independent from the Soviet Union. The Italian Communist leadership first advocated "polycentrism"--a degree of autonomy for each national party--in June 1956. In a published interview that year, Palmiro Togliatti pointed out that "there are many roads to socialism" and insisted on a system in which bilateral party relationships would replace complete dependence on the USSR. Under pressure, however, he subsequently modified these views by calling for "democratic centralism." Togliatti redefined this term to involve close contacts with the Soviet Union, but allowed for certain variations in policy to take account of national conditions in each country.

The Italian leadership in 1964 began to re-emphasize polycentrism, and on 5 September published a "memorandum" by Togliatti, who had just died. In this document, Togliatti stressed full support for the Soviet Union in the Sino-Soviet ideological conflict but said that a formal split with China must be avoided. The PCI, he said, "would be against any proposal to create once again a centralized international organization"; unity must be achieved "in the diversity of our concrete political positions" in each individual country. Togliatti emphasized that the nonruling Communist parties should be more flexible and adapt to local conditions. He criticized the Soviet leaders for the reluctant pace of de-Stalinization and called for frequent contacts among Communist

parties--based on equality and not on Moscow's traditional rule of "unanimity" imposed from above.

The Mediterranean Conference Movement

In 1967 and early 1968, the Italian Communists attempted to develop a line separate from that of the Soviets by supporting a regional Mediterranean conference that was to include leftist as well as Communist parties. The proposal had been originated by the Yugoslav Communists and a left-wing Italian Socialist splinter group.

The PCI backed the idea of cooperating with the non-Communist "progressives" in order to help the party during Italy's elections in the spring of 1967. By establishing an identification not only with Tito but with the various leftist parties in the area, the PCI hoped to shed its old domestic image as a tool of Moscow and thereby increase its appeal to the electorate.

The idea of a Mediterranean gathering gained strength after the Israeli-Arab war of June 1967. The decisive Israeli victory had stunned the Arab governments and had heightened fears among local "progressive" parties that the US would become more involved in the area. This situation, in the words of these parties, created the threat of "aggressive Atlantic-American imperialism" and threatened to transform the Mediterranean into a potentially explosive new "front" or "scene of dangerous confrontation" between the US Sixth Fleet and the newly introduced Soviet naval units.

After preliminary meetings in Italy and Yugoslavia, some 17 leftist and Communist parties from 12 Mediterranean countries met in Rome from 9 to 11 April 1968, but little emerged from the secret discussions. The Mediterranean movement has had little impact, and now appears to have been dropped, at least temporarily.

The Soviet Union reportedly was consulted by the Yugoslavs on the project but, as a non-Mediterranean power, probably never received an invitation nor sought to send a delegation. The Soviet reaction was cool and Moscow was probably put off by the Yugoslav proposal to discuss the presence of Soviet naval units. In addition, the Soviets undoubtedly feared the development of ideas and positions that would strengthen trends toward autonomy and jeopardize their hegemony in international Communism.

The Developing Soviet-Czechoslovak Crisis

The Italian Communists believed that the decentralization of the international Communist movement, as exemplified in Prague's experiment, was important to their domestic political success. The PCI, which expected to decline in the national elections in May 1968, actually went up from 25.3 to 26.9 percent

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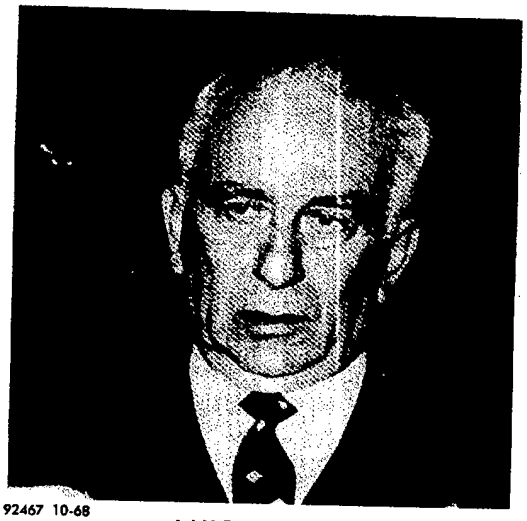
of the total vote. This success may have resulted partly from the adoption by the Czechoslovak and French Communist parties of more nationalistic roles.

As the Czechoslovak crisis developed, the Italian Communist leaders sought both publicly and privately to dissuade the Soviets from violent action. [redacted] reports "dramatic clashes" during the Italian-Soviet talks in Moscow from 14 to 16 July. Carlo Galluzzi, the leader of the foreign affairs section of the Italian party, told the Soviets that his party backed the new Czechoslovak leaders. He warned that, should the Soviets intervene militarily in Czechoslovakia, the Italian party would formally and publicly dissociate itself from the act. After he returned, Galluzzi told the PCI directorate that French Communist leader Waldeck Rochet, who had gone to Moscow with the Italians, had taken a similar but less explicit position against Soviet intervention.

Publicly, too, the PCI sought to demonstrate its support for Dubcek. The official party organ L'Unita reported on 30 July that the PCI believed that "frank and fraternal debates and meetings" should be held in an attempt to end the divergence of views over Czechoslovakia. On 6 August, a PCI communiqué expressed satisfaction that the Bratislava meeting had reaffirmed Communist solidarity and collaboration "on the basis of the autonomy of each party and each country in the search for ways of development of Socialist society." On 14 August, party secretary general Luigi Longo flew to Moscow for a "brief period of repose" that presumably included talks with Soviet leaders about Czechoslovakia.

Intervention

The intervention shocked the PCI and came as a surprise, as far as timing was concerned, even to the leaders. They were widely scattered in Italy and abroad for the traditional Italian August holidays. Only two PCI politburo members could be found to work with lesser officials in drafting a pronouncement on party reaction. The leaders decided on immediate censure and issued a communiqué on 21 August after telephone clearance from Longo in Moscow, but without consultation with other top-ranking party



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LUIGI LONGO
Secretary General of the Italian Communist Party

ITALIAN SUPPORT FOR THE USSR IN PREVIOUS CRISES

The Italian Communist Party (PCI), on several occasions prior to the Czechoslovak crisis, sided with Moscow when Soviet policies were under fire. Most notably, the PCI supported its Soviet colleagues during the de-Stalinization controversy in 1956, again later that year at the time of the Soviet intervention in Hungary, and during the Arab-Israeli war in 1967.

The Italian party, even though torn by internal dissension during the furor over de-Stalinization, nevertheless maintained its support of Moscow. The publication of Khruschchev's speech denouncing Stalin in February 1956 at the 20th Soviet Communist Party Congress provoked serious ferment and demands for clarification. In order to soften the consequences and prevent a rebellion within his party, Togliatti gave an interview in which he interpreted the events in the Soviet bloc as the beginning of a new course for the Western Communist parties. This exposition of "polycentrism" remained a dead letter, however, and political life within the party continued to develop along the officially established lines. During the whole summer of 1956, the party assumed a cautious attitude of expectation with regard to further de-Stalinization. The difficulties seemed to be gradually subsiding, until the Hungarian insurrection took place at the end of October 1956.

The crisis over the Soviet invasion of Hungary shook not only the rank and file of the Italian party but the leadership as well. Protests came in from all over the country, and the hostile attitude of the rank and file threatened party integrity. Further developments—Suez, primarily, and Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact—enabled the Italian Communist leadership, which supported the Soviet action as "a grievous necessity," to regain control.

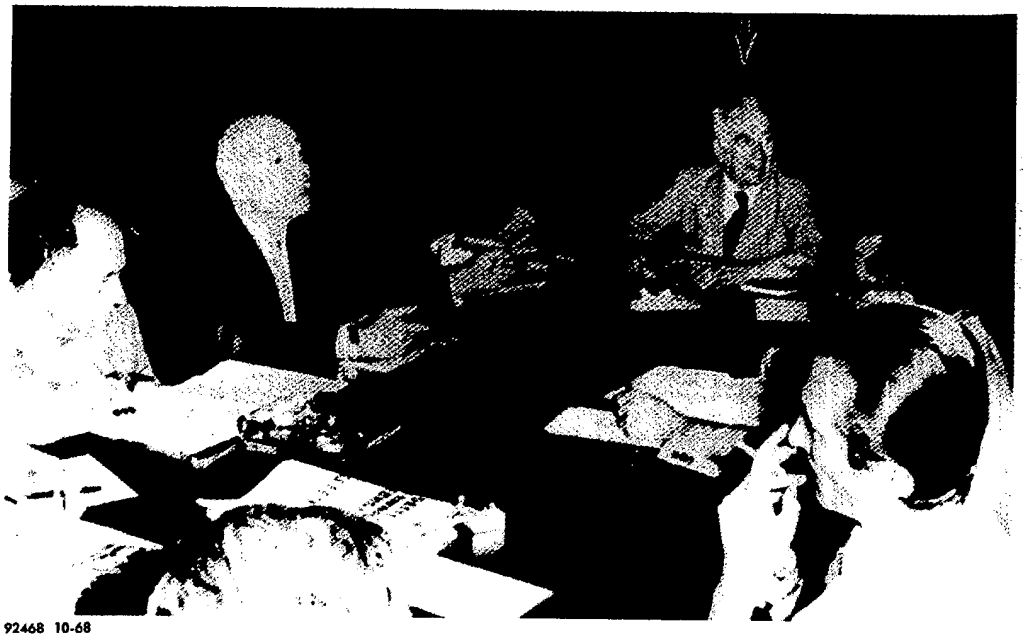
In the Arab-Israeli dispute of 1967, there were serious differences within the party, with right-wing leader Amendola opposing the strong Soviet support for the Arabs and left-wing leader Ingrao endorsing it. In no case, however, did the Communist press or the party leadership publicly criticize the Soviets. Although at first the party lagged behind the Soviets in pro-Arab expressions, within a few weeks the PCI line was fully in harmony with Moscow's. Disagreement within the party was evidenced most notably by the resignation of the editor of the important Communist-line paper Paese Sera.

members. Party leaders are reported to have commented that this situation was worse than the Hungarian intervention, that it upset everything the Italian Communists had done since 1945, that Brezhnev and Kosygin were American agents and should be shot, and that the Soviet Union was on the road to Nazism.

During the week after the intervention, all Communist federations throughout Italy ratified the leadership position, [redacted] Below the federation level, however, local PCI leaders expressed doubt and disagreement on both sides of the issue. Particularly among older Communists, there was some tendency to trust the Soviets. Nevertheless, the old Stalinists still prominent in the party failed to defend the USSR, and the two most prominent leaders sided unequivocally with Longo's position. Middle-class Communists, intellectuals, and many younger members considered the PCI position too bland.

Italian Support for Czechoslovakia

After the intervention, the PCI made a strong effort to rally international Communist opposition to the Soviet action. The Italians wanted to protect the Dubcek government, if possible, but in any case to distinguish the Italian Communist position clearly and unmistakably from



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Luigi Longo presides at the meeting of the Italian Communist Party leadership on 23 August.

that of the Soviets. The PCI made a special point of working with its French colleagues. Longo stopped for consultation in Paris on his flight home from Moscow on 22 August, and both parties called for the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. In early September, Italian Communist emissaries visited Sofia and Budapest as well as Bucharest and Belgrade. They held further consultations with the French and, according to several reports, with other West European parties, including the British, the Austrian, and the Spanish.

The Italian Communists were determined to block a world-wide Communist ratification of the Soviet intervention at the international meeting long scheduled to open on 25 November in Budapest. They sought to have the meeting postponed indefinitely, and evidently found much sympathy for this point of view at the preparatory meeting in Budapest on 30 September. A new preliminary session is now scheduled for 17 November and, [redacted] the Soviets have moved their target date for a general conference to May 1969.

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Effect on Auxiliaries

The Italian reaction to the Soviet invasion has been reflected in Communist auxiliary organizations as well as in party affairs. The Communist-dominated Italian labor confederation, CGIL, endorsed the party's condemnation of the USSR in a commemorative issue of L'Unita one month after the intervention. CGIL leaders refused a request to go to Moscow for an immediate parley with the Soviets, and instead insisted on consulting with Yugoslav and French labor leaders--and with the Czechoslovaks--in a meeting on 30 September - 1 October. In addition, the Prague-based World Federation of Trade Unions--apparently at the initiative of Italian and French officials--condemned the Soviet invasion.

In the World Peace Council, [redacted] the French and Italian members requested a meeting of the leadership to discuss the situation. The two delegations succeeded in fomenting a reaction described by a Soviet official as "very confused" and "very bad."

The Italian Communist youth federation is also at odds with its Soviet control elements. The PCI and the youth federation reportedly have reached an agreement to avoid all encounters with Soviet functionaries except at the highest party levels. PCI leaders may well have feared that the Soviets would try, as they have in France, to persuade party elements to support the Soviet position. The top levels of the Italian party are also undoubtedly eager to keep lower levels of the party from making de facto policy until they themselves have set over-all direction.

The secretary general of the federation evidently tried to postpone a visit in late

September of a Komsomol mission that the Soviets had already scheduled and announced. A Soviet Embassy official refused to discuss the question with the Italians, however, insisting that the Komsomol group was coming anyway.

Repercussions and Prospects

The Italian party's stand against Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia represents a new degree of autonomy from the Soviets. The party's position is, in fact, an outright rejection of Soviet leadership of the world Communist movement, even if the Italian comrades continue to say polite things about the importance of the USSR in that movement. The Italian party under its present leadership is unlikely to return to the relationship it had with the Soviet party before August. The PCI has been unequivocal and persistent in criticizing the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. It was in the forefront of efforts to strengthen opposition to the Soviets in Communist parties throughout the free world. Moreover, although some low-level Italian Communists still think the USSR is infallible, the Italian Communist leadership has given every sign of an unusual degree of cohesion, and Luigi Longo's position as top leader seems enhanced.

In trying to bring the Italian Communists into line, the Soviets have two principal weapons, a threat to cut off financial aid and a threat to read the Italian party out of the Communist brotherhood. Some sources have suggested that the Soviets will first choose to cut off the flow of funds.

After the PCI had disapproved of the Soviet march into Czechoslovakia, Amerigo Terenzi, director of the party press and apparently the agent for Soviet press subsidies, remarked to the director of the influential Paese Sera that in two or three months the paper might have to close [redacted] Terenzi added that, as things were going, it was practically certain there would be no more money. As yet, however, there is no evidence that Moscow has cut its financing.

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Although the Soviets have long provided the Italian Communist Party with substantial financial support, it is not clear how essential Soviet aid is to maintaining the size and strength of the party. In 1956, the USSR contributed about $7.5 million to a party budget of just over $11 million, according [redacted] Since then, however, the Soviet subsidy has probably decreased markedly, but the Soviets undoubtedly continue to provide additional funds for special occasions such as election campaigns.

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Soviet financial pressure on the Italian Communist Party may also take the form of curtailing trade through Communist-influenced Italian commercial operations, which have customarily given a substantial cut to the party. The party could perhaps make up part of any shortfall

in Soviet funding by seeking increased contributions from private Italian industry. Italian industrialists have long opposed putting all their eggs in one basket and, as a matter of policy, contribute to all political groups with major potential. Italy's industry has thus contributed substantially to the PCI over many years to provide itself with a friend at court if the PCI achieves its ambition of entering a government coalition. The PCI's success on a local government level and in the labor movement has also provided industry with reasons to contribute.

If the split widens between the Soviet and Italian parties, the Soviets may seek to emphasize throughout the world Communist movement that the Italians have deviated from the true Marxist line. Such an indictment would be damaging to the Italian Communist sense of belonging to a world movement, a sense that has been part of their appeal. Even in this event, however, the Italian party is not likely to view itself as having taken a unique stand on Marxist doctrine.

Over the long term, if there were no alternative, the Soviets could undoubtedly split the Italian Communist Party and could then provide support to a faction accepting Moscow's dominance. Any such faction, however, probably would draw only a small percentage of present Italian Communist strength. In any case, the Soviets would probably make a strong effort first to secure more friendly Italian party leadership by bringing pressure for the ouster of some leaders and by attemping to show others--through fear or favor--the practicality of a pro-Soviet stance. The most likely immediate outlook therefore, is for continuing tension between the two parties.

In domestic politics, the Italian party will seek to use its disagreement with the Soviets to further its contention that it is not a "tool of Moscow." The party must avoid such a stigma if it is to make further progress toward its most ardently sought domestic objective--developing cooperation with left-wing Christian Democrats and Socialists to the point where the Communists will be accepted as partners in a government coalition. [redacted]

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